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SUBJECT: POPE ENCOURAGES CROATIA'S EU ASPIRATIONS

¶1. POPE JOHN PAUL II VISITED CROATIA BETWEEN JUNE 5-9 -- HIS THIRD VISIT TO THIS OVERWHELMINGLY CATHOLIC COUNTRY. IN HIS OPENING ADDRESS ON ARRIVAL AT THE RIJEKA AIRPORT THE POPE NOTED THAT "CROATIA RECENTLY SUBMITTED ITS APPLICATION TO BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART, BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY, OF THE BIG FAMILY OF EUROPEAN NATIONS -- I CANNOT BUT EXPECT A DESIRE FOR FAST FULFILLMENT OF THESE ASPIRATIONS."

¶2. THE VISIT DOMINATED THE CROATIAN MEDIA AND WAS WITHOUT EXCEPTION PORTRAYED POSITIVELY. USING RIJEKA AS A BASE, THE POPE TRAVELED TO DUBROVNIK AND ZADAR ON THE COAST, AND TO OSIJEK AND DJAKOVO IN EASTERN SLAVONIA. KEY POLITICAL FIGURES INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER WELCOMED THE POPE'S MESSAGE OF SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTRY'S EFFORTS TO JOIN THE EUROPEAN UNION.

¶3. IN OSIJEK THE POPE GREETED A CROWD OF 200,000 AND NOTED THAT IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR, WHICH LEFT DEEP AND STILL UNHEALED WOUNDS ON THE POPULATION, IT REQUIRES A LOT OF COURAGE TO PROMOTE RECONCILIATION, SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. THE PRESENCE OF SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH DIGNITARIES WAS AN IMPORTANT FEATURE OF THE VISIT.

¶4. GOC OFFICIALS REPORTED THAT RESTITUTION OF THE CHURCH'S NATIONALIZED PROPERTY WAS NOT ON THE AGENDA IN MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT MESIC OR PRIME MINISTER RACAN. GORAN GRANIC, A DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND THE GOC POINT PERSON FOR RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH, STATED THAT MANY INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS HAVE SIMILAR CLAIMS, BUT THAT NO ONE SHOULD BE PRIVILEGED IN THIS PROCESS. HOWEVER, PRESS REPORTS IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT CITED NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT UNDER WHICH THE CHURCH COULD RECEIVE AS MUCH AS 25 PERCENT OF THE STATE-OWNED CROATIA INSURANCE COMPANY AS COMPENSATION FOR A PART OF ITS PROPERTY NATIONALIZED UNDER THE COMMUNISTS.

COMMENT

¶5. ACCORDING TO IVICA MASTRUKO, PRESIDENT MESIC'S ADVISER FOR RELIGIOUS ISSUES AND CROATIA'S LONG-SERVING AMBASSADOR TO THE VATICAN, THE POPE'S SUPPORT FOR CROATIA'S EU ASPIRATIONS WAS PARTICULARLY AIMED TOWARD THE LOCAL CHURCH, WHICH HAS BEEN VOCALLY SKEPTICAL OF THE GOC'S EURO-ATLANTIC ASPIRATIONS. NATIONALIST AND ISOLATIONIST TENDENCIES ARE MOST NOTABLE AMONG DALMATIAN BISHOPS, SOME OF WHOM HAVE GONE AS FAR AS TO PUBLICLY SUPPORT INDICTED WAR CRIMINALS. WHILE WE DO NOT EXPECT ANY CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF LOCAL CHURCH OFFICIALS, THE VISIT SHOULD BOOST THE POSITION OF ARCHBISHOP JOSIP BOZANIC, CROATIA'S TOP CHURCH OFFICIAL AND A REPUTED MODERATE, WHO HAS A REPUTATION OF BEING MORE IN LINE WITH THE VATICAN POLICY.

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